

# PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: JOHN WAYNE

*a candid conversation with the straight-shooting superstar/superpatriot*

For more than 41 years, the barrel-chested physique and laconic derring-do of John Wayne have been prototypical of gung-ho virility, Hollywood style. In more than 200 films—from “The Big Trail” in 1930 to the soon-to-be-released “Million Dollar Kidnapping”—Wayne has charged the beaches at Iwo Jima, beaten back the Indians at Fort Apache and bloodied his fists in the name of frontier justice so often—and with nary a defeat—that he has come to occupy a unique niche in American folklore. The older generation still remembers him as Singing Sandy, one of the screen’s first crooning cowpokes; the McLuhan generation has grown up with him on “The Late Show.” With Cooper and Gable and Tracy gone, the last of the legendary stars survives and flourishes as never before.

His milieu is still the action Western, in which Wayne’s simplistic plotlines and easily discernible good and bad guys attest to a romantic way of life long gone from the American scene—if indeed it ever really existed. Even his screen name—changed from Marion Michael Morrison—conveys the man’s plain, rugged cinematic personality. Fittingly, he was the first of the Western movie heroes to poke a villain in the jaw. Wearing the symbolic white Stetson—which never seemed to fall off, even in the wildest combat—he made scores of three-and-a-half-day formula oaters such as “Pals of the Saddle” in the Thirties before being tapped by director

John Ford to star in “Stagecoach”—the 1939 classic that paved the way for his subsequent success in such milestone Westerns as “Red River,” the ultimate epic of the cattle drive, and “The Alamo,” a patriotic paean financed by Wayne with \$1,500,000 of his own money.

By 1969, having made the list of Top Ten box-office attractions for 19 consecutive years, Wayne had grossed more than \$400,000,000 for his studios—more than any other star in motion-picture history. But because of his uncompromising squareness—and his archconservative politics—he was still largely a profit without honor in Hollywood. That oversight was belatedly rectified when his peers voted the tearful star a 1970 Oscar for his portrayal of Rooster Cogburn, the tobacco-chewing, hard-drinking, straight-shooting, patch-eyed marshal in “True Grit”—a possibly unwitting exercise in self-parody that good-naturedly spoofed dozens of his past characterizations. President Nixon remarked several months later at a press conference that he and his family had recently enjoyed a screening of “Chisum,” adding: “I think that John Wayne is a very fine actor.”

Long active in Republican politics, Wayne has vigorously campaigned and helped raise funds for Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George Murphy, Barry Goldwater and Los Angeles’ maverick Democratic mayor Sam Yorty. Before the 1968 campaign, a right-wing Texas billionaire had urged Wayne to serve as Vice-

Presidential running mate to George Wallace, an overture he rejected. Not least among the Texan’s reasons for wanting to draft Wayne was the actor’s obdurately hawkish support of the Indochina war—as glorified in his production of “The Green Berets,” which had the dubious distinction of being probably the only pro-war movie made in Hollywood during the Sixties.

Last fall, Wayne’s first television special—a 90-minute quasi-historical pageant dripping with God-home-and-country hyperbole—racked up such a hefty Nielsen rating that it was rebroadcast in April. At year’s end, Wayne was named one of the nation’s most admired entertainers in a Gallup Poll. Assigned by PLAYBOY shortly afterward to interview the superstar, Contributing Editor Richard Warren Lewis journeyed to Wayne’s sprawling (11-room, seven-bath) \$175,000 bayfront residence on the Gold Coast of Newport Beach, California, where he lives with his third Latin wife—Peruvian-born Pilar Pallete—and three of his seven children. Of his subject, Lewis writes:

“Wayne greeted me on a manicured lawn against a backdrop of sailboats, motor cruisers and yachts plying Newport harbor. Wearing a realistic toupee, Wayne at first appeared considerably younger than he is; only the liver spots on both hands and the lines in his jut-jawed face told of his 63 years. But at six feet, four and 244 pounds, it still almost seems as if he could have single-



“I believe in white supremacy until the blacks are educated to a point of responsibility. I don’t believe in giving authority and positions of leadership and judgment to irresponsible people.”



“The Oscar meant a lot to me—even if it took them 40 years to get around to it. But I really didn’t need it. I’m a box-office champion with a record they’re going to have to run to catch. And they won’t.”



“Tomorrow is the most important thing in life. Comes in to us at midnight very clean. It’s perfect when it arrives and it puts itself in our hands. It hopes we’ve learned something from yesterday.”